

Thousand Miler Essay

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I went backpacking at the beginning of December 2020. It was a last minute decision and my two friends Stacey and Karen had a plan to cover East Lake, Rib Lake, Wood Lake and Timberland on the Ice Age trail. I had just retired from a job I liked but a boss that I didn't like. The outdoors has always been my favorite place to be so this seemed like a great place to start the next chapter of my life.

It was cold! It was dark! We had no Wifi and I brought nothing to read except the map. In our tents from 5pm to 6am – that's a LONG time to think. I almost bailed out the next morning but kept going for one more night. We ended up at Wood Lake to camp. Still no Wifi but we were entertained that night by a singing lake. I had no idea that even existed and my first thought was "what kind of animal is that?"

We finished the next day and just like that I thought I should do this. I should do the entire trail. I told my friends I was going to do the entire trail and they were very surprised. And that was probably because of my wanting to bail out after the first night. But they soon learned how determined I can be as the journey took me less than a year.

Hiking the IAT requires so much more than the hike. For one thing you have to have a good sense of direction and the tools to get you to trailheads. You have to be able to reach out to others for help unless you want to bike shuttle the entire trail. You have to be able to know how many miles you can travel in a day on foot. There is a lot of planning involved and I loved that part. And for me I had to become a better driver as I connected with others all over the state.

I kept a journal and took lots of pictures. So I have lots of stories and wonderful memories.

However, my favorite part was when Ellen (my new friend from 1000 miler FB page) and I walked from Indian Lake to Cross Plains. The Liebetrau property belonged to my husband's family and I have many fond memories of family gatherings in that farmhouse. More importantly, because the family sold the land to the IAT we can always go home. Jim's parents would be so happy to see the land was restored to prairie. His Dad never wanted it to become residential. Perhaps others who hike the trail will also decide to help with land acquisition so the trail can continue to expand.

The other thing about the trail is it made me look upon my community in a new light. I love that Janesville embraced the IAT – I just wish that more people knew about it. I am an avid bicyclist but walking the roads I usually bike made me slow down and take a second look at my surroundings.

So now that I'm finished I intend to keep introducing new friends to the trail. Maybe one of them will decide to chase the blazes also. I intend to continue to hike with my new trail buddies. Ellen is almost done and I am hoping to be on the last leg of her journey. Sue (my new friend from 1000 miler FB page) doesn't intend to do the CR's . But I said I would hike all the trail sections she needs to complete. And without a doubt I will be hiking other trails and looking for new adventures.